



Success story

Muslim leaders promote and practice family planning in Nasarawa state

Despite high-level campaigns promoting the benefits of family planning, convincing people of the benefits sometimes presents a challenge. With a high fertility rate of averaging 5.8 children per women, and an annual population growth of 2.8%, the country remains the most populous nation in Africa at over 140 million. This has dire implications for the already stretched public infrastructure and services. Health facilities in the country's vast rural areas are scarce, understaffed and undersupplied. Where services do exist, cultural and social pressures limit women's ability to use them, especially in conservative communities like Unguwa Waje, a rural community located in Keffi local government area in Nasarawa state.



Student Habibatu Musa delivering family planning messages during the last Ramadan fasting season
Photo: Kemi Ayanda, COMPASS

Recognizing that religious leaders are respected members of the community and potential proponents and advocates of family planning, the USAID funded Community Participation for Action in the Social Sector (COMPASS) project conducted a workshop for thirty Muslim religious leaders in the state on the appropriateness of contraceptive use. The objective of the training was to dispel myths about family planning, improve their perspectives toward contraception, and motivate them to advocate publicly for family planning. The workshop adopted a document authored by the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN), a COMPASS project partner, and involved the association's state chapter.

Initially, there was some apathy during the workshop. "At first, the religious leaders did not share the perspective at all", according to COMPASS reproductive health coordinator, Kubra Ahmed. Affirming this position, one of the scholars, Nasiru Muhammed Auwal, said, "I did not think Islam supported family planning and had to make further research after the orientation". Commending the collaboration with FOMWAN, another participant, Khalid Idris Bala, said, "FOMWAN's involvement helped clarify the views." The workshop also guided participants in developing action plans which included the dissemination of family planning messages during Islamic lectures and to other colleagues.

Nasiru, whose wives adopted modern family planning methods following the workshop, described how the new-found knowledge helped him resolve a conflict between a husband and his two wives who were students in his class. He not only disseminates messages to women during lectures, but to men in the community as well. In a lecture during the 2007 Ramadan Tafsir (Islamic fasting season),

students in Nasir's class shared their new knowledge and expressed what a difference it had made in their lives. One student, twenty-one-year-old Khadijat Abigide, though unmarried, expressed her delight about the timely information. "I now educate my friends about the importance of using health and education services. With this new knowledge, I am equipped to make informed choices when I am ready", she said.

Mallama Aisha Ibrahim Idrama, a popular female scholar in the area, included messages on family planning to her 400 student population during the Tafsir. Twenty-five-year-old Fadimatu Suleiman, a student and mother of six, recently adopted a family planning method and is happy about her ability to make the choice in consultation with her husband. According to Fadimatu, "We went together to the facility and after some counseling, decided against more children for now."

This intervention has continued to contribute to increased use of contraceptives. A recent study by USAID implementing partner MEASURE Evaluation revealed a dramatic increase in contraceptive use from 7.8% to 20% in Nasarawa State and an overall increase from 9% to 25% in USAID supported local government areas in the five states between 2005 and 2007.

